

VZCZCXRO1519
PP RUEHPA
DE RUEHAB #0054/01 0181106
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
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FM AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2451
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUEHDS/AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA 0076
RUEHKI/AMEMBASSY KINSHASA 0394
RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA 1508

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABIDJAN 000054

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KINSHASA PASS TO BRAZZAVILLE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/17/2017

TAGS: PREL PGOV UNSC ASEC IV

SUBJECT: TWELFTH MEETING OF THE INTERNATIONAL WORKING

GROUP: MORE USEFUL THAN USUAL

Classified By: POL/ECON Jim Wojtasiewicz, reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

¶1. (C) Summary. At an unexpectedly short twelfth meeting of the International Working group (IWG), Prime Minister Banny sought to convince the group that the political situation here is not at a total impasse, but he had almost no progress to show. Rebel FN (New Forces) leader Soro stressed the overarching importance of settling once and for all the question of who is Ivoirian, in order to finally resolve this country's crisis. He challenged the international community to use its leverage to force President Gbagbo to cede Prime Minister Banny real power; otherwise he questioned whether the international community had any right to expect Banny to carry out the tasks envisioned for him under UNSCR 1721. The final communique from this meeting recommends that the Security Council urge a more robust, pro-active African mediation effort, and that the Security Council visit here in support of that effort. These both seem like good ideas -- for once the IWG seems to have come up with more than empty words at the end of the day. End Summary.

¶2. (U) The IWG held its twelfth meeting on January 12, 2007 in Abidjan, co-chaired as usual by Congolese Foreign Minister Rodolphe Adada and UN Special Representative of the Secretary General in Cote d'Ivoire (SRSG) Pierre Schori. In attendance were European Union Commissioner for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Assistance Louis Michel; French Cooperation Minister Brigitte Girardin; Ghana Foreign Minister Nan Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo; German Minister of State at the Federal Foreign Office Gernot Erler (representing the EU presidency); Niger Foreign Minister Aïchatou Mindaoudou; South African Deputy Foreign Minister Aziz Pahad; ECOWAS Executive Secretary Mohamed Ibn Chambas; UN High Representative for

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Elections in Cote d'Ivoire (HRE) Gerard Stoudmann; Special Representative of the AU Chairman Jean Marie Mokoko; and representatives from Benin, Guinea, Nigeria, the United Kingdom, the United States, the AU, the World Bank, and the International Organization of French Speaking Countries (Francophonie).

¶3. (C) The meeting was unexpectedly short, in part because it was somewhat disrupted by meetings that President Gbagbo had requested, separately, with co-chairs Adada and Schori, French Minister Girardin, and EU Commissioner Michel.

¶4. (C) As usual, Prime Minister Banny briefed the group on efforts since the last meeting to move the country closer to elections. Banny acknowledged that his tandem with President Gbagbo is broken, and efforts to implement UN Security Council resolution 1721 are near impasse. He said the re-launching of identification throughout the country (to

register the 3.5-4 million undocumented people born in Cote d'Ivoire) is stalled because President Gbagbo has so far refused to sign the decree appointing new judges for the tribunals that will issue certificates of nationality. However, he said his staff had finished a long painstaking series of consultations with all interested parties, including political parties, the rebel FN, magistrates, and court clerks, and the ground is cleared for identification to go forward as soon as Gbagbo signs the decree. Furthermore, Banny said there were enough existing tribunals in Abidjan to relaunch identification there the following week. Banny told the IWG that the return of civil administration to the North is continuing, and he noted that the junior finance minister delegate had traveled to the North to discuss with the FN the restoration of the banking system there.

¶5. (C) FN leader and deputy prime minister Soro also addressed the group. He explained that he had only accepted President Gbagbo's offer of a direct dialogue on the condition that this would be a means to accelerate the implementation of UNSCR 1721. Soro added that he also planned to consult fully with political opposition leaders to work out a common position before entering into this direct dialogue with Gbagbo. Soro said frankly that the Prime Minister has only theoretical powers -- Gbagbo's sacking of the management of RTI (Radio TV Ivoire), a clear violation of the Pretoria Agreement, proves that the government has no power. Soro asked rhetorically whether the international community has any power in Cote d'Ivoire. If not, he suggested that it should not expect the Prime Minister to be able to implement UNSCR 1721. Soro characterized Cote d'Ivoire's crisis as first and foremost an identity crisis.

The question of who is Ivoirian must be settled thoroughly, once and for all. He said he continued to have misgivings about the new procedures for identification, whereby birth certificates and certificates of nationality must be issued

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by separate courts -- in July, all parties including Gbagbo had agreed that these would be issued simultaneously by the same courts. Soro said he would be prepared to consider going forward under the new procedures but only if they can be implemented in such a way as to give identity papers to each and every Ivoirian. At this point, Soro said it does not appear that President Gbagbo really wants all Ivoirians to be identified, and it is up to Gbagbo to prove differently.

¶6. (C) In the question and answer session, French Minister Girardin asked directly why Banny has not signed the decree appointing new judges himself, using the decree powers envisioned under UNSCR 1721. Banny answered evasively that he understood well from the previous IWG meeting that such powers are indeed envisioned under UNSCR 1721. Soro added bluntly that if the Prime Minister did sign any decree, fifteen minutes later the President's spokesman would appear on television declaring Banny's decree invalid. Co-chair Adada and Francophonie Ambassador Kouyate noted that Banny had proposed that the tribunals issuing nationality certificates be mobile, like the courts issuing birth certificates, but Gbagbo still insists that they must remain fixed, and they asked whether this was acceptable. Banny responded that he would reluctantly accept it. Soro reiterated that the modus operandi that had been agreed on, for the same mobile courts to issue both, was being unilaterally blocked. He reiterated that identification is too important to be implemented partially, and it is up to President Gbagbo to find a way to deliver the citizens their documents.

¶7. (C) UN HRE Stoudmann, AU Special Representative General Mokoko, ONUCI Force Commander General Amoussou, and Licorne Force Commander General Lecerf all gave short presentations on the complete lack of progress on identification and disarmament.

¶8. (C) A relatively brief and straightforward communique was

accepted with little debate. The communique notes the total impasse in the implementation of UNSCR 1721, mainly due to the refusal of some Ivoirian parties to accept it. It indicates that the international community has no objection to President Gbagbo's proposed direct dialogue with Soro, but only if it focuses on the implementation of UNSCR 1721. Finally, the communique recommends that the Security Council urge the AU and ECOWAS to call all the main Ivoirian parties together as soon as possible to unblock the current impasse, and that a mission of the Security Council visit Côte d'Ivoire to underscore support for the AU/ECOWAS mediation and press the Ivoirians directly to fully implement UNSCR 1721. The meeting ended at 5:00 p.m., instead of after 9:00 p.m. as was the case for the previous three meetings.

¶9. (C) The next meeting will be February 23.

¶10. (C) Comment. Soro is right that the IWG has little leverage to break the current impasse if the Ivoirians themselves, including of course Soro, refuse to budge from their entrenched positions. That said, both of the suggestions in the communique -- a more robust, pro-active African mediation effort and a Security Council visit here in support of that effort -- seem like good ones. For a change the IWG seems to have come up with more than just empty words at the end of the day. End Comment.

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